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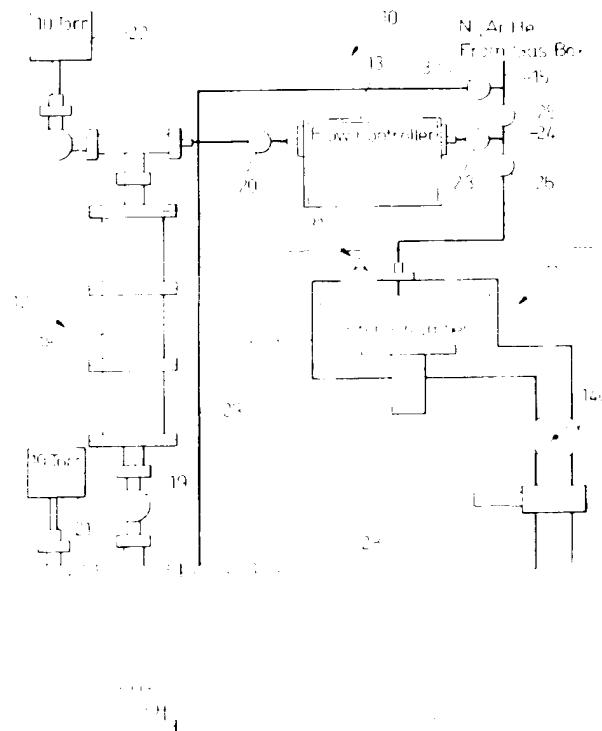
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(54) **Method and apparatus for etching a workpiece**

(57) An  $\text{XeF}_2$  source 12 comprises a  $\text{XeF}_2$  source chamber 16 which includes a tray or ampoule 17 for  $\text{XeF}_2$  crystals 17a, a reservoir 18 via valve 19, a flow controller 13 fed by the reservoir 18 and a valve 20 be-

tween the reservoir 18 and the controller 13. Pressure sources 21 and 22 are provided respectively to maintain the reservoir 18 and the source chamber 16 at the sublimation pressure of  $XeF_3$ . The arrangement allows for a steady supply of  $XeF_3$  to an etching chamber.



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**Description**

This invention relates to methods and apparatus for etching a workpiece using Xenon Difluoride ( $XeF_2$ ). Xenon Difluoride is a dry isotropic gas phase etchant which provides a gentle etch for silicon at low temperature. Xenon Difluoride is usually supplied in the form of colourless crystals which sublime without decomposition. The sublimation pressure for  $XeF_2$  is approximately 4 Torr.

Present attempts to use  $XeF_2$  for etching have been essentially experimental and have taken place using a pulsed supply of  $XeF_2$  which requires the etch to be stopped and started with the etch chamber being pumped down between each etch step. Such an arrangement is impracticable for production processes. Direct flow has been attempted unsuccessfully.

From one aspect the invention consists in a method of etching a workpiece using  $XeF_2$  comprising allowing  $XeF_2$  in its solid phase to sublimate into its gaseous state into a reservoir of sufficient volume to provide gas at a pre-determined flow rate for a pre-determined etch period, supplying the gas at the desired flow rate to an etching chamber containing the workpiece and etching the workpiece.

The  $XeF_2$  gas may be mixed with an inert carrier gas prior to its introduction into the etch chamber. It is particularly preferred that the  $XeF_2$  source continues to sublimate during the outward flow of  $XeF_2$  from the reservoir. Additionally or alternatively the reservoir may be recharged between the etching of separate workpieces.

From a further aspect the invention consists in apparatus for etching a workpiece comprising an etched chamber, a  $XeF_2$  source, a reservoir, valve means for connecting the source to the reservoir to allow sublimation of the source into  $XeF_2$  gas, a flow controller for feeding the etch chamber and valve means for connecting the reservoir to the flow controller.

Preferably the apparatus includes pressure control means for maintaining the reservoir at approximately the sublimation pressure of  $XeF_2$  when there is no outward flow from the reservoir. Means may be provided for mixing the  $XeF_2$  gas with an inert carrier gas prior to its introduction into the process chamber. It is particularly preferred that the flow controller is a pressure-based flow controller.

A chamber will normally be provided for the solid  $XeF_2$  and conveniently the reservoir may have a volume which is approximately three times the volume of the  $XeF_2$  chamber.

Although the invention has been described above it is to be understood that it includes any inventive combination of the features set out above or in one following description.

The invention may be performed in various ways and a specific embodiment will not be described by way of example reference to the accompanying drawing which is a schematic view of etching apparatus.

Etching apparatus is generally indicated at 10 and comprises an etch chamber 11, a  $XeF_2$  supply generally indicated at 12, a flow controller 13, a roughing pump assembly generally indicated at 14, and a carrier gas supply 15.

The  $XeF_2$  supply comprises a  $XeF_2$  source chamber 16 which includes a tray or ampoule 17 for the  $XeF_2$  crystals 17a. The source chamber 16 is connected to a reservoir 18 via a valve 19 which in turn is connected to the flow controller 13 by a valve 20. Pressure sources 21 and 22 are provided to respectively maintain the reservoir 18 and source chamber 16 at approximately 4 Torr which is the sublimation pressure of  $XeF_2$ . Downstream of the controller 13 is a valve 23 which connects the flow controller to a supply line 24 between valves 25 and 26. Valve 25 controls the flow of the carrier gas from supply 15 into the supply line 24 whilst valve 26 controls the supply of gases in the supply line 24 to an etch chamber 27 of the etching apparatus 11. As is conventional the roughing pump installation 14 is connected downstream of the etch chamber 27 but it is also connected to the source chamber 16 via bypass 28. A line 29 and valve 30 allows carrier gas to be supplied to this region for purging purposes.

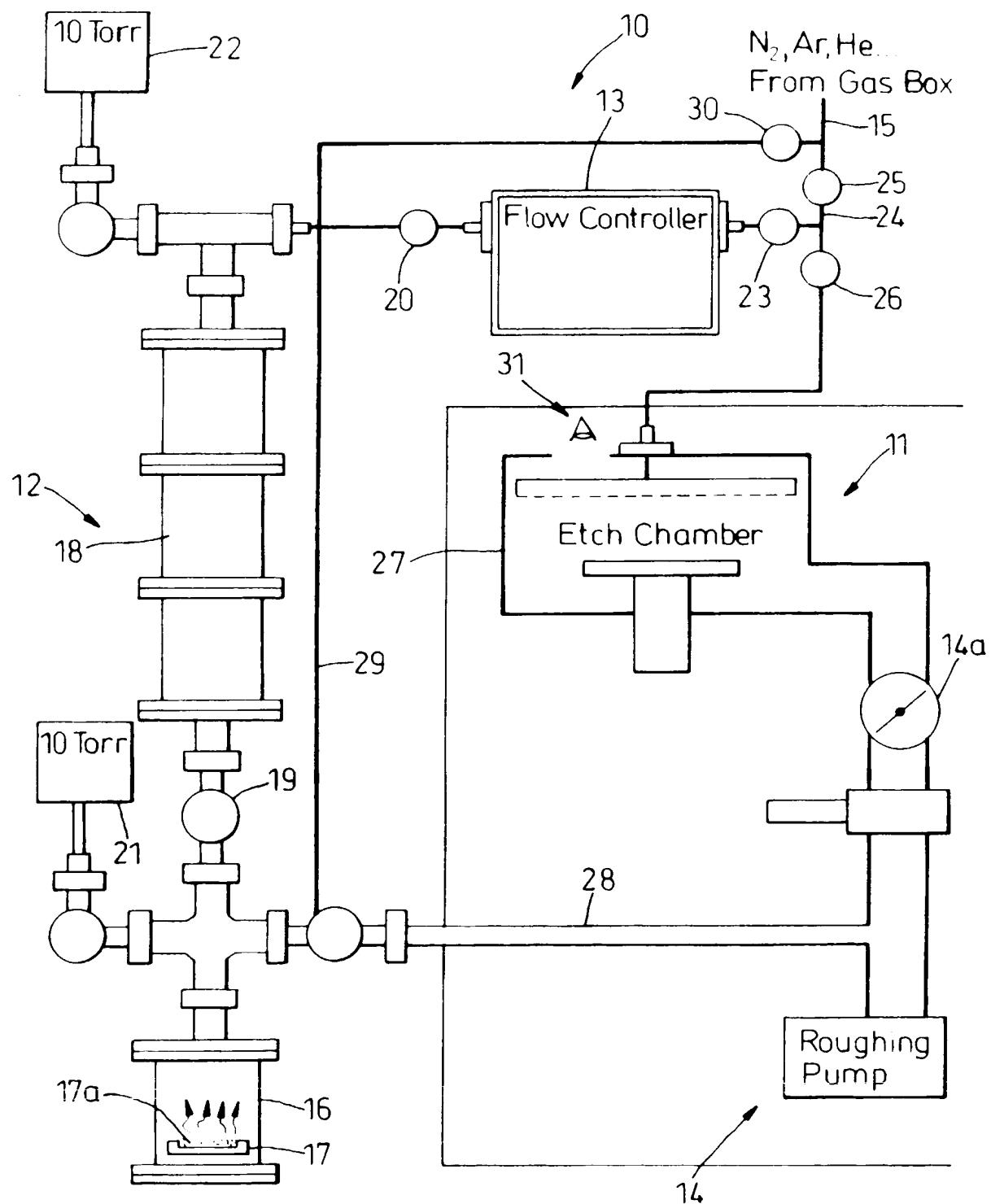
In this the  $XeF_2$  crystals are placed in the ampoule or tray 17 with the valve 19 closed and valve 30 open. Carrier gas is used to purge the chamber and the roughing pump assembly 14 pumps the source down to the sublimation pressure. The roughing pump assembly 14 and carrier gas are then isolated and valve 19 is opened allowing  $XeF_2$  gas to expand or diffuse into the reservoir 18.

A wafer is then loaded into the etch chamber 27 using conventional apparatus and valves 20, 23, 25 and 26 open sequentially to allow  $XeF_2$  and the carrier gas into the etch chamber where etching occurs spontaneously. The pressure within the chamber is controlled by the roughing pump assembly 14 and its automatic pressure control valve 14a. On certain occasions carrier gas may not be required in which case valve 25 remains closed.

Valve 19 may be open or closed depending on the process and production levels which are required. An optical detector generally indicated at 31 determines when the etch has been completed or alternatively a time basis may be used. Upon completion of the etch valves 20, 23, 25 and 26 are shut and the wafer is removed. By this time a new wafer is introduced into the chamber for etching the reservoir 18 is recharged and thus not only can each wafer be fully etched in one process, continuous etching of wafers is achieved. Continuous delivery of  $XeF_2$  also enhances uniformity and the use of a pressure based flow control mechanism 13 is considerably beneficial over say mass flow measurement. It will be noted that the process chamber pressure control is independent of the flow control mechanism for  $XeF_2$ .

## Claims

1. A method of etching a workpiece using  $XeF_2$  comprising allowing solid  $XeF_2$  to sublimate into its gaseous state into a reservoir of sufficient volume to provide gas at a pre-determined flow rate for a pre-determined etch period supplying the gas at the desired flow rate to an etching chamber containing the workpiece and etching the workpiece
2. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein  $XeF_2$  gas is mixed with an inert carrier gas prior to its introduction into the etch chamber
3. A method as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 wherein the  $XeF_2$  source continues to sublimate during outward flow from the reservoir
4. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 3 including recharging the reservoir between etches
5. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims wherein the flow rate is controlled on a pressure basis
6. Apparatus for etching a workpiece comprising an etch chamber a  $XeF_2$  source a reservoir valve means for connecting the source to the reservoir to allow sublimation of the source into  $XeF_2$  gas a flow control of the feeding of the etch chamber and valve means or connecting the reservoir to the flow controller
7. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 6 further including pressure control means for maintaining the reservoir at approximately sublimation pressure of  $XeF_2$  when there is no outward flow from the reservoir
8. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 6 or Claim 7 further comprising means for mixing the  $XeF_2$  gas with an inert carrier gas prior to its introduction into the process
9. Apparatus as claimed in any one of Claims 6 to 8 wherein the flow controller is a pressure based flow controller





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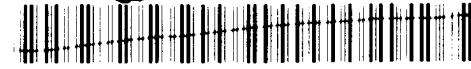
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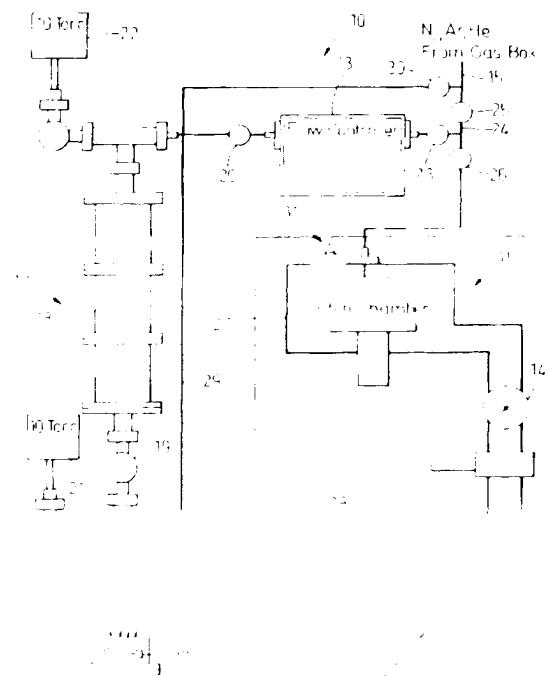
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## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number  
EP 98 30 3196

## DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Description of document & the location, where appropriate of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl 6)
E	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 1998, no. 13. 30 November 1998 (1998-11-30) & JP 10 209083 A (MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC CORP), 7 August 1998 (1998-08-07) * abstract *	1-3, 6, 8	H01J37/32
A	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 010, no. 325 (E-451). 6 November 1986 (1986-11-06) & JP 61 134019 A (NEC CORP), 21 June 1986 (1986-06-21) * abstract *	1, 6	

TECHNICAL FIELDS  
SEARCHED (Int.Cl 6)

H01J

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	25 November 1999	Schaub, G
CATEGORY OF RELATED DOCUMENTS		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prior art relevant taken alone <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prior art relevant combined with another document of the same category <input type="checkbox"/> Technical disclosure <input type="checkbox"/> Non-patent disclosure <input type="checkbox"/> Reference document		
<input type="checkbox"/> Theory or principle underlying the invention <input type="checkbox"/> Earlier patent document but published on or after the filing date <input type="checkbox"/> Document cited in the application <input type="checkbox"/> Document cited for other reasons <input type="checkbox"/> Member of the same patent family - corresponding document		

ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT  
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.

EP 98 30 3196

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office ECD file on:

The European Patent Office is in no way responsible for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

25-11-1999

Patent document of European search report	Publication date	Patent family members	Publication date
JP 10209086 A	07-08-1998	NONE	
JP 61134019 A	21-06-1986	NONE	

